

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 126

INFO AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABDA

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, UR, NI

SUBJECT: SOVIET MEDIA USES KID GLOVES ON NIGERIAN COUP

1. SUMMARY. SOVIET MEDIA TREATMENT OF THE ATTEMPTED COUP IN NIGERIA HAS BEEN BRIEF AND CAUTIOUS, BUT REASONABLY STRAIGHTFORWARD, THUS REFLECTING MOSCOW'S USUAL RELUCTANCE TO COMMIT ITSELF IN SITUATIONS OF THIS TYPE UNTIL THE SMOKE HAS CLEARED. NEVERTHELESS, THE BEGINNINGS OF ANTI-U.S. OVERTONES ARE BEGINNING TO APPEAR IN PRESS REPORTS, AND THE KREMLIN DISPATCHED A FAIRLY HIGH-POWERED DELEGATION TO SIGN THE CONDOLENCE BOOK AT THE NIGERIAN EMBASSY. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE STORY BROKE IN THE FEB 14 PRAVDA WITH A VERY BRIEF

TASS REPORT THAT A RADIO LAGOS ANNOUNCEMENT SAID A GOVERNMENT COUP HAD TAKEN PLACE. THE FATE OF MUHAMMED AND HIS COLLEAGUES WAS UNKNOWN, ACCORDING TO PRAVDA. SPECIFICS OF THE CURFEW AS WELL AS THE CLOSURE OF AIR-PORTS AND BORDERS WAS INCLUDED. THE FOLLOWING DAY, PRAVDA CARRIED AN EVEN BRIEFER REPORT THAT THE COUP HAD BEEN PUT DOWN BUT THAT MUHAMMED HAD BEEN KILLED. THE ARTICLE SAID THAT OBASANJO HAD TAKEN OVER THE GOVERNMENT, AND THAT DIMKA AND HIS GROUP HAD BEEN ARRESTED.

3. IN THE FEB 16 PRAVDA ANOTHER SHORT REPORT CONCENTRATED ON OBASANJO'S RADIO AND TV APPEALS FOR CALM, AND EMPHASIZED HIS STATEMENTS THAT THE COUP HAD BEEN REPELLED BECAUSE OF THE SOLID SUPPORT OF THE NIGERIAN PEOPLE FOR THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. PRAVDA FEB 17 WAS SILENT ON THE SITUATION, BUT ON FEB 18 THE FIRST ANTI-U.S. STATEMENTS APPEARED IN THE STILL BRIEF ACCOUNTS. PRAVDA REPORTED THE INTENTION OF THE NIGERIAN PEOPLE TO HONOR THE MEMORY OF MUHAMMED, AND NOTED THAT THE COURSE OF HIS FOREIGN POLICY WAS POINTED IN AN "ANTI-IMPERIALIST DIRECTION." DEMONSTRATORS IN IBADAN, PRAVDA ADDED, CARRIED SIGNS BEARING SUCH SLOGANS AS "WE DO NOT WANT CIA AGENTS IN NIGERIA*" OBASANJO ALSO REPORTEDLY VOWED TO CONTINUE MUHAMMED'S POLICY OF ANTI-IMPERIALISM, THE PRAVDA REPORT CONCLUDED.

4. IZVESTIYA FEB 17 REPORTED THAT AN OFFICIAL SOVIET DELEGATION SIGNED THE CONDOLENCE BOOK AT THE NIGERIAN EMBASSY. MEMBERS OF THE GROUP WERE: DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE PRESIDUM OF THE USSR SUPREME SOVIET, T. KULATOV; DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE USSR COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, I.B. ARKHIPOV; PRESIDENT OF THE USSR-NIGERIA SOCIETY, V.I. TEREBILOV; DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, L.F. IL'ICHEV; AND, MAJOR GENERAL G.A. BORISOV FROM THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE.

5. COMMENT. MOSCOW'S EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS PUBLIC TREATMENT OF THE EVENTS IN NIGERIA IS IN KEEPING WITH THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SOVIET UNION' USUAL RELUCTANCE TO COMMENT ITSELF IN A CRISIS SITUATION UNTIL IT BECOMES CLEAR WHICH WAY THE WINDS ARE BLOWING. IN NOW SEEMS APPARENT, HOWEVER, THAT THE SOVIET UNION FEELS OBASANJO IS THE WINNER IN THIS PARTICULAR STRUGGLE AND IS STARTING TO TRUMPET HIS ASCENSION. THE LEVEL OF THE BOOK SIGNING DELEGATION, COUPLED WITH THE PLAUDITS DIRECTED AT MUHAMMED'S POLICIES OF ANTI-IMPERIALISM, ALSO POINT TO THE FOREIGN

POLICY PATH THE SOVIETS WOULD LIKE TO SEE OBASANJO
CONTINUE.
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